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ABSTRACT

The variation in conflict and ambiguity among a national sample of directors of school district research and evaluation units is explored. The approach developed argues that variation in evaluation unit directors' role conflict and ambiguity is a function of both school district and evaluation unit characteristics, since both sets of organizational features influence the social context within which the director functions. Three school district variables (formalization, size, and heterogeneity), and three evaluation unit variables (history, budget, and staff size) were used. Results showed school district variables as significantly related to ambiguity and conflict, while evaluation unit variables correlated with ambiguity but not conflict. The argument that the social resource characteristics of the school district are key sources of information about the conflict and ambiguity confronted by directors was not resolved. It was concluded, however, that evaluation units must become involved in classroom activities if they are to affect school district functioning. (Author/GK)

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ROLE CONFLICT AND AMBIGUITY AMONG SCHOOL DISTRICT EVALUATION UNIT HEADS

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Table of Contents

	Page
Approach and Hypotheses	2
Conflict	5
Ambiguity	6
School district variables	8
Evaluation unit variables	10
Results	11
Conflict, ambiguity, and use of evaluation data	16
Conclusions	19
Footnotes	22
References	24

ROLE CONFLICT AND AMBIGUITY AMONG SCHOOL DISTRICT EVALUATION UNIT HEADS[1]

This exploratory study seeks to explain variation in conflict and ambiguity among a national sample of directors of school district research and evaluation units. The approach developed argues that variation in evaluation unit directors' role conflict and ambiguity is a function of both school district and evaluation unit characteristics since both sets of organizational features influence the social context within which the director functions.

School district research and evaluation unit heads face complex administrative problems. Their organizations are, typically, both new and small (Lyon, Doscher, McGranahan, & Williams, 1978). The resources they have available, in part because of their newness and size (which makes competition with other units difficult), are scarce. At the same time, the demands placed upon them by powerful persons and organizations in their school district and elsewhere are extensive and growing. Federal, state, county, and other school units increasingly require information from school districts concerning the effectiveness of program functioning in specified areas.[2] Moreover, since the field of evaluation research has emerged recently, the background and training of unit directors is frequently in other areas. This combination--minimal job training, increasing service demand, and inadequate resources--provide all the ingredients necessary for deep-seated role conflict and ambiguity.

Increasingly, organizational theorists are recognizing the significance of environmental factors on organizations. Perrow (1979) has referred to this emphasis as a "new wave-gathering force." Theorists in the fields of contingency, resource dependence, ecology, political economy, and open

systems (Hall, 1977; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978; Aldrich, 1979; Zald, 1969; Katz & Kahn, 1966) all emphasize in one form or another the impact of the environment on the focal organization. This focus is particularly important to the understanding of leader behavior in newly-created boundary-spanning organizations (Aldrich & Herker, 1977) such as research and evaluation units. The research evidence suggests that boundary-spanners experience high levels of role conflict (Organ, 1971 and 1976; Organ & Green, 1972; Adams, 1976; Miles, 1976). The evidence is less conclusive regarding the relationship between boundary-spanning and role ambiguity. The most systematic study of ambiguity is that of March and Olsen (1976). March and his colleagues not only view ambiguity as closely linked to the choice process but, in addition, assert that it is endemic to public and educational organizations (Cohen & March, 1976). In a recent review of role conflict research Whetten (1978) observed that "... what is significant about the literature on boundary spanning is the noticeable lack of interest in systematically exploring the sources of role conflict." With the exception of the March and Olsen study, the same could be said about research on role ambiguity.[3]

APPROACH AND HYPOTHESES

Although role conflict and ambiguity are related (see Kahn et al., 1964), they are not identical. Conflict comes from the quality and quantity of demands placed on persons while ambiguity refers simply to perceived uncertainty. The relationship between these variables is largely unexplored. March and Olsen (1976) claim that individuals find themselves in a more

complex, less stable, and less understood world than that described by standard theories of organizational choice; they are placed in a world over which they often have only modest control" (p. 21). Ambiguity in educational organizations, especially among leaders in this type of social system, is the name of the game. As for role conflict, the pioneer empirical study of the phenomenon by Gross, Mason, and McEachern (1958) was of school principals. Given the newness and instability of school evaluation units both phenomena should be extant in our sample.

Contrary to the standard portrait of schools as unsuccessful organizations, Meyer (1977) pictures them as highly successful because they have survived and even substantially expanded their resource base. The basis for their success is their conformity to society's institutionalized rules and the fact that they have become "relatively decoupled from the technical work of instruction." Unlike business firms which carefully control their technical structures, schools leave the actual instructional tasks relatively unevaluated and uncontrolled. Since evaluation units may be technically responsible both for student testing and for reviewing instructional programs, we might expect that evaluation unit directors face far more conflict and ambiguity than their counterparts in business firms. Their work is actually or potentially related to the schools' most fundamental tasks.

Our approach emphasizes the preeminent affect of context or structure on the organizational subunit and thence on role conflict and ambiguity. Three school district variables influence the context within which evaluation units function: formalization, size, and heterogeneity. Each of the variables affect the extent of interest group pressures likely to be experienced by the unit director.

"Formalization" refers to rules; its opposite is anomie. The more regulated the district organization the greater the unit's administrative control over uncertainty. The more formalized the organization, the more protected the unit head feels (Gouldner, 1954; Miles & Perreault, 1976) and the less likely he/she experiences role conflict. Both district size and heterogeneity influence diversity of interest groups in the district.

Kahn et al (1964) note that persons in positions that link units are more likely to be subjected to conflicting requirements and pressures because they interact with persons who have competing goals and standards. However, formalization should relieve some of this conflict insofar as rules closely specify task and goal responsibilities. Size and heterogeneity affect a district's political capabilities and its ability to capture resources from the society. While, on one hand, large size and heterogeneity demand respect and hence enable districts to command greater amounts of resources, on the other hand, they imply more competing interest groups; the greater the diversity of interest groups in a school district, the more likely there will be conflict among them. Hypothetically, interest group conflict in the school district should lead to role conflict and ambiguity among evaluation unit heads.

The unit variables of concern are history and resource availability. The former was measured here by length of time the unit has existed. Pfeffer (1979) suggests that survival is the ultimate test of organizational effectiveness and history is inextricably linked to that concept. The latter variable was here measured specifically by budget and number of staff personnel. History and unit resources are substantially determined by decisions external to the focal unit. Pfeffer also proposed that

persons have less effect on organizations than the institutional context because selection processes ensure homogeneity among leaders. Leaders are seen as having little discretion, anyway; the major impact on outcomes stems from resource availability and, in school districts in particular, this is generally outside the unit head's control (Leiberson and O'Connor, 1972). Since a unit director's uncertainty mainly revolves around resources, we might have anticipated that unit variables would have a greater impact on ambiguity than on conflict.

Conflict

"Roles" are generally defined as sets of expectations about behavior associated with organizational positions. Role conflict takes place when the occupant of a position encounters inconsistent demands and expectations. Four types of role conflict have been identified by Rizzo, House, and Lirtzman (1970):

> "1. Conflict between the focal person's internal standards or values and the defined role behavior... 2. Conflict between the time, resources, or capabilities of the focal person and defined role behavior... 3. Conflict between several roles for the same person which require different incompatible behaviors... 4. Conflicting expectations and organizational demands in the form of incompatible policies, conflicting requests from others, and incompatible standards of evaluation."

Rizzo, House, and Lirtzman developed the factorially identifiable and independent measures of role conflict and ambiguity that we adapted for use in the present project. Six items with the highest factor loadings were selected from their larger set. The items, listed with percent agreement in our sample, were as follows:

Items	% Agree or Strongly Agree
I receive assignments without the manpower to complete them.	65
I work under incompatible policies and guidelines.	21
I have to buck a rule or policy in order to carry out an assignment.	20
I receive assignments without adequate resources and materials to execute them.	51
I have to do things that should be done differently.	53
I receive incompatible requests from two or more people.	27

It should be noted that over fifty percent of the respondents selected the high role conflict response in three of the six items. Two of these three were concerned with inadequate resources.

Ambiguity

"Role ambiguity" refers to the situation that takes place when the occupant of a position lacks the appropriate role-related information. This occurs when the position is not clearly defined or when access to needed information is impeded (for example, because of the occupant's inexperience or because of the newness of the position in the organization). Specifically then, ambiguity refers to the degree of felt certainty regarding one's duties, authority, allocation of time, and goals. To measure ambiguity the five items with the highest factor loadings were selected from the Rizzo, House, and Lirtzman set. The items listed with percent agreement in our sample were, as follows:

Items	% Disagree or Strongly Disagree
I feel certain about how much authority I have.	18
I have clear, planned goals and objectives for my job.	12
I know that I have divided my time properly.	30
I know what my responsibilities are.	10
I know exactly what is expected of me.	20

It is apparent from the above that role ambiguity was less common among directors than was conflict. The large proportion of the sample reported little ambiguity. Although we lacked comparative data, these findings would seem to contradict March and Olsen's claim regarding the pervasiveness of ambiguity. Consistent with Rizzo, House, and Lirtzman, we found a significant negative correlation between role conflict and ambiguity. ($r=-.19$, $p<.001$. See Table I.) It may be that conflict produces expectational clarity. That is, the harder one must work and the more corners must be cut to get the work done, the less uncertain one is (or has time to be) about one's job.

The respondents were selected through a two-stage process. First, letters were sent to all 750 school superintendents in districts with 10,000 or more students and to a 30% sample of the 573 school districts with 5,000-9,999 students. All of the larger districts and 81% of the smaller ones responded indicating whether or not their district had an evaluation unit. Next, in spring, 1978, a questionnaire was sent to all 336 large school districts (10,000 or more students) and to the 74 smaller ones identified as having evaluation units. A total of 263 unit heads (or 64.1%) returned the schedule.

The evaluation unit heads were, typically, highly experienced and professionally trained individuals. Sixty-five percent held the doctorate, most usually in administration, elementary or secondary education, statistics, or educational or general psychology. Almost three out of ten had been school principals and over half were once elementary or secondary school teachers. Very few (14.4%) had had any formal course work in evaluation. No significant relationship was found between taking such courses and role conflict or ambiguity.

One important function of school district evaluation and research units is to provide information of value to school administrators. Most of these units report directly to the superintendent or through one intermediary. The job involves monitoring school programs indirectly and emphasizes testing student achievement.

School District Variables

Three variables were used: formalization, size, and heterogeneity. Hage and Aiken (1970) and Hall (1977) define formalization as the rules and procedures organizations establish to handle contingencies. All unit heads were asked to report the extent to which there were written school board policies in six areas: student conduct in classrooms, introduction of instructional innovations, type of curricular material to be used, student conduct on school grounds, instructional methods teachers use, and criteria used in evaluating student learning. This was consistent with Pugh et al.'s (1968) definition of formalization as "the extent to which rules, procedures, instructions, and communications are written." A factor analysis of the scale resulted in one factor (unnamed) that explained 39 percent of the variance of the items. Average item-item

correlation was .26. Cronbach's (1951) Alpha was .68, indicating replicability and reliability.[4]

School districts were classified by size into four groups: metropolitan districts (enrollment, 45,000 or more); large districts (enrollment, 25,000-44,999); medium districts (enrollment, 10,000-24,999); and small districts (enrollment, 5,000-9,999). Existence of an evaluation unit was positively related to size. (Districts under 5,000 students were excluded from the study.)

"Heterogeneity" referred mainly to the ethnic-racial student mix in the district. The measure selected was percent of students eligible for the nationwide free-lunch program. As Table 1 shows, this measure correlated significantly with percent White, percent Black, percent Hispanic, and percent students scoring in the bottom quartile.

TABLE 1

Correlations Among Indicators of District Heterogeneity

	Percent Black	Percent Hispanic	Bottom Quartile Students	Percent Free Lunch
Percent White	-.77**	-.47**	-.63**	-.76**
Percent Black		-.12**	.56**	.69**
Percent Hispanic			.27**	.25**
Bottom Quartile Students				.66**

* $p < .05$

** $p < .001$

Tests of significance are two-tailed.

Blau (1977) defines heterogeneity as "the distribution of a population among groups in terms of a nominal parameter" (p. 9). He lists thirteen nominal parameters: sex, race, religion, ethnic affiliation, clan, occupation, place of work, place of residence, industry, marital status, political affiliation, national origin, and language. The greater the number of groups and the more evenly a population is divided among them, the greater the heterogeneity. The free-lunch program is based on willingness to participate. Using this measure as a heterogeneity index probably maximized the ethnic-racial mix as well as the mix on marital status, national origin, and language. On the other hand, it may well be associated with economic homogeneity. Unfortunately, data was unavailable to ascertain the association of the index with each of these variables.

Evaluation Unit Variables

"History" referred to the length of time the unit was in existence. As anticipated, most were new organizations. Over one-third (35%) were five years old or less while 62% were ten years of age or under. Only about one-seventh of the units (14%) had been in existence fifteen years or longer.

Two indexes of resources were used. Monetary resources were measured by the unit's percentage of the school district's yearly budget. In general, the larger the unit's percent of the budget the greater the amount of slack resources (defined by Cyert & March, 1963, as the difference between existing resources and activated demands). Personnel resources were determined by the number of full-time staff in the unit. In 23 units only part-time staff were employed; in 108 there was only one full-time employee;

and 81 units ranged in size from 2-5 full-time persons. The largest unit reported 90 staff members. It may be assumed that the larger the staff the greater the personnel resources and the more slack.

RESULTS

In Table 2 the means, standard deviations, N's, and intercorrelations are presented for the principal variables used in the study. The findings show that the three district variables were significantly related both to ambiguity and conflict, while the unit variables correlated with ambiguity but not conflict.

Evaluation unit variables were history, budget, and staff size. A slight negative correlation was found between history and ambiguity. The longer the unit was in existence, the less ambiguity was experienced by the director. A modest relationship was found between the two resource indexes and ambiguity. Budget and staff availability, which not surprisingly were positively correlated with one another, generate increased demands on the director. In March and Olsen's (1976) terms, slack provides solutions for problems and sufficient participants for each and every choice. The greater the unit's slack resources, the more problems for the director and hence the greater his/her uncertainty as to how to resolve them.

No significant relationships were found between the three unit variables and role conflict. Two opposing hypotheses were possible: that new units would produce more role conflict than old ones in that the former, being less institutionalized, would be less able to reconcile incompatible

TABLE 2

Means, Standard Deviations, N's, and Correlations of Dependent and Independent Variables

Variable	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Ambiguity	History	EU Budget	EU Staff	District Size	District Formalization	District Heterogeneity
Conflict	263	2.23	.69	-.19***	-.004	-.03	.07	.16***	-.08*	.12**
Ambiguity	263	2.96	.47	--	-.07*	.19***	.16**	.03	.10**	.13**
History	249	68.33	10.36	--	--	.16**	-.10**	-.16**	-.01	-.08*
EU Budget	223	33.83	42.68	--	--	--	.31***	.007	-.04	.06
EU Staff	262	4.77	9.94	--	--	--	--	.44***	-.03	.25***
District Size	263	2.51	.99	--	--	--	--	--	.002	.33***
District Formalization	263	1.95	.42	--	--	--	--	--	--	-.16**
District Heterogeneity	225	24.74	19.79	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

* $p < .10$

** $p < .05$

*** $p < .001$

Tests of significance are 2-tailed

demands and pressures; or, alternatively, that old units would experience greater role conflict since they had had more time to become known, would thereby generate more demands from external units, and hence, experience greater pressures than new units. However, neither history nor slack engendered inconsistent demands and expectations for the director. It might have been anticipated that slack would increase the director's role conflict since demands increase when more resources are available, that, insofar as these demands outrun resources, conflict results. This model suggests that the relationship between slack and conflict is curvilinear.

The bivariate relationships between school district characteristics and the dependent variables were, with one exception, statistically significant. District size was related to role conflict but not to ambiguity. Kahn et al (1964) also found a significant correlation between size and role conflict. Size has been related to structural elaboration (Meyer, 1972) and to subgoal development (Dearborn and Simon, 1958), both indexes of differentiation. Differentiation creates a lack of consensus which generates role conflict for the administrator.

Formalization bore a negative relationship to role conflict which may mean that rules act as intended in regulating expectations and enhancing consensus. However, formalization bore a positive relationship to ambiguity. That is, the more rules, the greater the director's uncertainty--obviously not the intended function of rules. It may be that large numbers of rules and policies are so cumbersome and complex that they induce uncertainty among heads of units.

Heterogeneity was the final context variable. Not surprisingly, it was significantly correlated with district size. This was reassuring since large metropolitan districts should be the most diverse and small ones least diverse. Heterogeneity was positively related to role conflict. This finding supports Thompson's (1960) theory which asserted that heterogeneity of organization members generates role diversity which, in turn, causes organizational conflict. Organizations with heterogeneous populations develop numerous "latent roles" which present complex management problems. The same finding would be predicted by political economy and resource dependence theory (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978; and Zald, 1969): the greater the heterogeneity of the district, the more diverse and extensive are competing groups. The more there are of such groups, all seeking to assert their interests, the more conflict experienced by the unit head. His/her task is complicated under such circumstances as he/she seeks to reconcile demands for information from teachers, community groups, parents, program directors, the school board, principals, administrators, and, in the case of desegregation, the courts. Heterogeneity was also positively correlated with ambiguity. One explanation is that heterogeneity leads to increased needs for information input and for distribution of output. The greater the number of such demands the less certain the director is regarding duties, authority, time allocation, and objectives. Hence, the greater the felt ambiguity.

The regression analyses were designed to tell us how much of the variance in conflict and ambiguity the complete set of independent variables explained. The regression equation used took the following basic form:

Conflict = a + b_1 (School District Variables) + b_2 (Unit Variables) + Ambiguity + Error.

The independent variables were regressed in stepwise fashion; first, on conflict and then on ambiguity. The district variables were entered first since presumably they were less controllable by the directors than were the unit variables. Tables 3 and 4 present the main findings. The multiple R for the equations ranged from .18 to .35 indicating that the independent variables accounted for only about 3% to 12% of the variance in conflict and ambiguity. Obviously, this was not a great deal. The more conservative adjusted R^2 measures which consider the number of variables in the equation, reduced this amount further.

TABLE 3

Regression of School District and Evaluation Unit Variables on Role Ambiguity

Independent Variable	Unstandardized Regression Coefficient	Standard Error	Standardized Regression Coefficient
Heterogeneity	.306	.001	.132
Size	-.233	.038	-.051
Formalization	.158	.078	.144
History	-.308	.003	-.065
EU Budget	.155	.0008	.146
EU Staff	.454	.003	.105
Conflict	-.128	.048	-.192
(Constant)	3.067		
Multiple R	.350		
R Square	.122		
Adjusted R Square	.088		

TABLE 4

Regression of School District and Evaluation Unit Variables on Role Conflict

Independent Variable	Unstandardized Regression Coefficient	Standard Error	Standardized Regression Coefficient
Heterogeneity	.366	.002	.105
Size	.138	.057	.200
Formalization	-.148	.120	-.090
History	.143	.005	.020
EU Budget	.161	.001	.0001
EU Staff	.948	.005	.014
Ambiguity	-.293	.111	-.194
(Constant)	2.888		
Multiple R	.337		
R Square	.113		
Adjusted R Square	.078		

To summarize this section and the results thus far, we anticipated that a selected set of school district variables and evaluation unit variables would explain role conflict and ambiguity among unit directors. In fact, we were able to explain only a small portion of the variance. We turned, next, to the problem of organizational influences on the use of evaluation information. The main question we sought to answer in this section was: Is there a relationship between the reported users of evaluation data and role conflict and ambiguity among unit heads?

Conflict, Ambiguity, and Use of Evaluation Data

Lyon, Doscher, and McGranahan (1978) provide extensive information on what evaluation unit heads do. They found that 95% of the unit directors

ranked student achievement as one of their most time-consuming activities. Seventy-four percent ranked it as the most time-consuming. Seventy-five percent of the directors claimed that testing was the major data collection method. Moreover, most unit heads reported that almost half their time, 46%, was spent on early childhood and elementary education. The authors of the report concluded that "... the survey and fieldwork confirm the continuing dominance of testing in all activities of evaluation offices..." (1978, p. 100).

David's (1978) intensive field study of school district use of Title I evaluations found that they "... do not primarily serve either as a means of judging the program or as a guide to program improvement." (p. V). This was so for three reasons: (1) Most programs were stable. Only minor changes took place anyway. (2) Typically, evaluation results were received too late to be useful; and (3) other factors, such as political demands, played a key role in program change. If these findings hold up when replicated then we must assume that these units mainly meet reporting requirements and do not play a significant part in program change. This may be because there isn't a great deal of program change other than that which comes about as a result of externally-imposed legislation.

Respondents were asked to identify the major users of their units' reports. It was found that the consistent users were program directors (62%), superintendents (60%), central office staff (58%), and principals (52%). Only one-third reported teachers as consistent users. This was about the same percentage reporting federal and state agencies as users. It was evident that the units service mainly the school administration.

As Table 5 demonstrates, role conflict was negatively correlated with service use by superintendents and principals; that is, those who did not

report these parties as consistent users were most likely to experience high conflict. This suggests that the closer the service ties between the evaluation unit head and the school superintendent and principals, the less conflict was experienced. In other words, the way unit heads reduced stress was by accommodating to those who held line authority over them.

TABLE 5

District Use of Evaluation Unit Data and

Role Conflict and Ambiguity

Reported Consistent User	Role Conflict	Role Ambiguity
Superintendent	-.20 (p=.02)	.19 (p=.02)
Principals	-.18 (p=.03)	.12 (p=.10)
Board members	---------	.19 (p=.001)
Parents or local citizen groups	---------	---------
Teachers	---------	-.21 (p=.007)
Central office staff	---------	-.15 (p=.04)
Federal agencies	---------	.10 (p=.003)
State agencies	---------	---------
Program Director	---------	.13 (p=.07)

A different pattern was found for ambiguity. Unit heads with high ambiguity were more likely to report superintendents, principals, program directors, board members, and federal agencies as consistent users of their services and less likely to report teachers and central office personnel as users. It appears that the greater the range of perceived use of evaluation services, the more the felt ambiguity. Any type of administrative contact can generate uncertainty, but contact with those highly placed in the organization (such as superintendents, principals, board members) was

associated with high ambiguity while contact with lower level roles (teachers, program directors) was associated with low ambituity.

Ambiguity occurs when shared role specifications are incomplete--the officeholder is unsure what is desired or how to behave. Unit directors felt most uncertain when consistent users were principals, superintendents, board members, program directors, and federal agencies. Perhaps this was because these officials not only have organizational clout, but also have little confidence in the test data the evaluation units produce. Their profound lack of confidence in the units' major product was described and analyzed by David (1978) who quoted several officials' telling criticisms of standardized test results:

> "How can you evaluate when kids are starting at different places and developing at different rates? Means don't mean anything." (Director)
>
> "Individual diagnostic tools provide the basis for my judgment of program success; not the standardized tests." (Principal)
>
> "If the standardized test scores are negative, it's okay because everyone buys the argument that they can be discredited." (Administrator)

David (1978) also reported that teachers were critical of testing. However, unit heads' ambiguity was low when teachers were consistent users, probably because they were less threatened by teacher criticisms. The low regard of their superiors understandably carried more weight.

CONCLUSIONS

Juvenal wrote in his Satires, "But who is to guard the guardians themselves?" while Plato, much less the realist, stated in the Republic,

"What an absurd idea--a guardian to need a guardian." Evaluation is a booming enterprise and evaluation units in school districts are to be found in many districts of substantial size. These units are conceived by some to be public guardians, data collectors, and assessors. This paper argues that the social resource characteristics of the school district--that is, the external context within which evaluation units function, and the organization of the unit itself--are key sources of information about them and particularly about the amount of conflict and ambiguity confronted by the directors. Contrary to expectations, school district and evaluation unit variables did not explain much of the variance in the directors' role conflict and ambiguity. However, our findings do suggest that evaluation unit heads fill a very difficult position in the school district and that a key source of their difficulties is that their main output is not highly regarded by their superiors. Still another problem stems from the fact that they have limited contact with the programs they evaluate. These two problems are related because if they had better contact with major school programs they would have access to information which could enhance their organizational position and power and improve the quality of their contribution. The directors' overall level of role conflict was high while their level of role ambiguity was low. Since power and ambiguity are highly correlated, this latter finding reflects their low power. It may be that the tasks of the directors are too well established and not ambiguous enough. If evaluation units are to make a difference in school district innovation and functioning, they must involve themselves closely in classroom activities and related

programs. Although this would produce greater uncertainty for the directors it could also help make their evaluation tasks considerably more meaningful.

FOOTNOTES

1. Data Collection for this study was undertaken by the Center for the Study of Evaluation, UCLA under the direction of Dr. Catherine Lyon. I am grateful for her assistance, and for the support, financial and otherwise, of the Center's staff, particularly Dr. Eva Baker and Dr. Adrianne Bank. This project was also partially supported by NIMH (MN-14583). I am most appreciative of the research assistance of Pamela Tolbert and the typing of Andrea Anzalone. John Meyer and Mary Ann Millsap provided many helpful comments on the manuscript.

A few comments on the history of the project will serve as useful background. In Spring, 1977 a group of UCLA faculty agreed to act as an advisory panel for the Center for the Study of Evaluation's (CSE) project on the role of evaluation in public school districts, directed by Dr. Catherine Lyon (Lyon, Doscher, McGranahan, and Williams, 1978). The functions of this group were two-fold: first, to advise the director regarding her national questionnaire survey of school districts and a set of planned case studies of school district evaluation units; and second, to develop papers "that would focus on issues relevant to the research project." (Committee members were O'Shea, Chair, and Williams, School of Education; O'Reilly, Management; Grusky and Zucker, Sociology. This became the core group although some other members served for brief periods of time. The quotation is from the letter of invitation to the author by the Committee Chair.) The early sessions were devoted to broad discussions of research strategy and to specific items that might be included in the questionnaire. The bulk of the responsibility and day-to-day work involved in designing, administering, and preparing the data from the questionnaire was performed under the supervision of the Project Director. The contributions of the advisory panel were primarily supplementary and supportive. The plan of the research program was to conduct two types of investigation. The main source of systematic data was to be a national survey of school district evaluation unit heads. The survey was to be supplemented by a small number of field studies of selected school systems. The study reported here is based only upon the national survey data since field-study data were unavailable. The questionnaire data themselves, of course, present several problems. We do not know who actually filled out the questionnaires. Although the head of each evaluation unit was requested to do so, someone else may in some cases have completed the forms. A second issue concerns the veracity of the responses. We have no way of knowing how each respondent perceived the questions, how carefully he/she replied, or how factually-based were the answers.

2. For example, Stufflebeam, et al. (1971) write: "As a response to <u>outside</u> pressures, many school districts have installed or are now installing evaluation units" (p. 268, underlines added).

3. March and Olsen (1976) refer to four types of ambiguity: the ambiguity of attention, ambiguity of understanding, ambiguity of history, and the ambiguity of organization. The ambiguity measure we used doesn't begin to do justice to the richness of this typology.

4. The correlation matrix and factor loadings may be obtained from the author upon request.

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